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Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on an in-depth evaluation of political affairs**

Summary

As decided by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-fourth session, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) undertook an in-depth evaluation of political affairs. Owing to the large scope of the subprogrammes of the Department of Political Affairs, it was not feasible to complete a comprehensive in-depth evaluation of the Department in its entirety. OIOS is conducting the evaluation in a phased manner. The present report reviews subprogramme 1 of programme 1 (Political affairs) of the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 and primarily the work of the regional divisions in conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding.

Over the past decade, the total number of armed conflicts has declined. By one measure, the number of major armed conflicts dropped from 33 in 1991 to 19 in 2004. While observers have attributed this decline in part to an "extraordinary upsurge in activism by the international community" led by the United Nations, the specific effects of United Nations actions are difficult to determine. Furthermore, the predominance of internal conflict makes every element of subprogramme 1 harder to implement. Overall, the implementation record of the Department of Political Affairs is considered mixed, and highlights the importance of working with regional partners, an area where there are important signs of progress.

* E/AC.51/2006/1.

** The delay in submission was caused by the time taken to evaluate and incorporate the comments received from the relevant stakeholders on the findings and recommendations contained in the report.

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The management and staff of the regional divisions demonstrate commitment and initiative, but have a complex and expanding set of work obligations and too few resources to meet them. Some inappropriate organizational structures and work processes further hamper their quality and timely delivery.

OIOS concludes that the regional divisions need substantial additional resources, and management, organizational and work process changes. The Office makes 10 recommendations to enhance the work of the regional divisions, including: clarification of their vision and role as focal point for conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding; strengthened institutional mechanisms for inter-agency communication and collaboration; and a mandated comprehensive change management process, intended to lead to restructured, renewed, and adequately resourced regional divisions.

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I. Introduction: mandate, scope and purpose

1. At its forty-fourth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to undertake an in-depth evaluation of political affairs, to be submitted to the Committee at its forty-sixth session.[1] The report has been reviewed by the relevant departments and their comments appear in italics as appropriate.

2. The political affairs programme is divided into five distinct subprogrammes and is implemented by eight divisions/units with the support of the management, policy, planning and other support units, as well as 41 special political missions, of which nine are administered by the Department of Political Affairs.[2] Owing to the large scope of its subprogrammes and support activities, it was not feasible to complete a comprehensive in-depth evaluation of the Department in its entirety. The evaluation is to be conducted in a phased manner. The present report covers only subprogramme 1, Prevention, control and resolution of conflicts, of programme 1 (Political affairs) of the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005. The other subprogrammes will be evaluated and the reports submitted to the Committee at its forty-seventh session.

3. The purpose of this in-depth evaluation is to determine the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the activities of the Department of Political Affairs in relation to its objectives under subprogramme 1.

II. Methodology

4. OIOS utilized the following five evaluation methods: (a) a self-administered survey of all regional division desk officers;[3] (b) self-administered surveys of non-random samples of 18 regional organizations, five regional commissions and 28 Special Representatives of the Secretary-General;[4] (c) 117 interviews with management and staff of the Department of Political Affairs (42), Secretariat departments and partners (55), and the primary clients of the Department's support, in particular the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (12), Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (4), as well as external partner institutions (4); (d) an analysis of programme data in the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS) and the Electronic Performance Appraisal System (e-PAS); and (e) a desk review of relevant documents, including previous internal and external assessments.

5. OIOS recognizes that the evaluation methodology has limitations. First, the evaluation focuses only on key activities of the regional divisions of the Department of Political Affairs in conflict prevention, peacemaking or peacebuilding. Second, it does not evaluate the work of the Secretary-General and his representatives, who are

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[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/59/16), para. 382.

[2] Other special political missions are administered by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department for Disarmament Affairs , the Counter-Terrorism Committee and the Department of Management.

[3] The response rate was 32 per cent.

[4] Response rates were 50 per cent, 100 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively.

the primary United Nations actors in preventive diplomacy and peacemaking, nor does it review the comparable work of other United Nations partners.

III. Background

6. The objective under subprogramme 1 of the Department of Political Affairs is to assist in the prevention, control and resolution of conflicts through peaceful means as well as to promote a more cohesive and integrated response by the United Nations system in addressing post-conflict peacebuilding challenges faced by countries emerging from crisis. This subprogramme is primarily implemented with support from the four regional divisions of the Department, namely: Africa I, Africa II, Asia and the Pacific, and the Americas and Europe Divisions.

IV. Evaluation findings

A. Contemporary conflicts and the need for better coordination and stronger partnerships to address them

1. There are positive trends in conflict prevention and peacemaking, but the nature of contemporary conflicts, with the predominance of intra-State and transnational conflicts, poses challenges to the effectiveness of the United Nations.

7. Over the past decade, the number of armed conflicts has declined substantially from its peak magnitude in the early 1990s.[5] Recent reports have attributed this decline in part to an "extraordinary upsurge in activism by the international community", led by the United Nations.[6] This is in reference to the increase in the number of United Nations preventive diplomacy missions and United Nations peacemaking activities. United Nations preventive actions, it is argued, helped to prevent a number of conflicts while more intense peacemaking promoted an increase in negotiated peace accords. However, despite the decline in conflicts, there is no indication that the trend will continue without continued preventive actions; and furthermore, some experts are concerned that ongoing contemporary conflicts are increasingly targeted at civilians and may have greater societal destruction.

8. The United Nations has been more successful in addressing inter-State conflicts through the good offices and preventive diplomacy actions of the Secretary-General and his representatives, but these have been less successful in addressing intra-State conflicts.[7] Host governments are often reluctant to negotiate with armed opposition forces, or to allow mediators to have access to them, as this is seen to bestow political status, credibility, and/or political legitimacy on the opposition. Such constraints are not unique to United Nations mediation, however,

[5] The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) data indicated a decline from 33 major armed conflicts in 1991 to 19 in 2004, *SIPRI Yearbook 2005*.

[6] *Human Security Report 2005* (Oxford University Press for the Human Security Centre, University of British Columbia,), pp. 23-25, 153-155.

[7] Barnett R. Rubin, *Prevention of Violent Conflict: Tasks and Challenges for the United Nations* (2005).

and the record of the past 15 years shows a number of instances where United Nations mediators have been successful.

9. Effective Department of Political Affairs support for such operational prevention activities[8] in the context of internal conflict (ongoing or impending) requires, however, much more in-depth and field-derived levels of knowledge than are currently available in the regional divisions. Significant strengthening and retooling of the regional divisions is needed, both to deepen their information and analytical capability and to develop and broaden their substantive connections to the rest of the United Nations system.

2. **There is limited success in structural prevention and peacebuilding.**

10. The United Nations approach to structural or multidimensional prevention[9] focuses on inter-agency cooperation, coordinated through various inter-agency mechanisms, including: the Executive Committee for Peace and Security at the policy level; the Interdepartmental Framework for Coordination on Early Warning and Preventive Action (known as the Framework Team) at the working level in Headquarters; and the Integrated Mission Task Forces, the Common Country Assessments and United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks in the field.

11. A study commissioned by the Department of Political Affairs found little collaboration among United Nations efforts at long-term or "structural" conflict prevention. It concluded that, "[w]ithout stronger cooperation with the international financial institutions (IFIs) or bilateral donors, the ability of the United Nations to wield influence through structural prevention tools or to use aid as an incentive is limited".[10]

12. Peacebuilding also requires a programmatic approach, but with emphasis on post-conflict restoration or transformation of governing institutions and legal regimes. Another study commissioned by the Department of Political Affairs concluded that post-conflict countries with United Nations field missions were no less likely to relapse into conflict than were countries without such missions.[11] On the other hand, because United Nations missions tend to be sent where peace may be toughest to build, had they not deployed, the relapse rate for those cases might have been even higher.

13. New and promising initiatives for cooperation are the Transitional Results Matrix, piloted in five countries by the United Nations Development Group and the World Bank, with extensive participation of other international financial institutions and donors, and the joint United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-Department of Political Affairs programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention, currently implemented in seven countries, focusing on developing the capacities, skills and processes that national actors need in order to

[8] Operational prevention includes early warning, preventive diplomacy and/or deployments of monitors.

[9] Structural prevention is longer term and works to build institutions of capable and responsive governance that address the root causes of conflict.

[10] Rubin, op.cit.

[11] Out of 27 United Nations missions established in post-conflict situations, armed conflicts resumed in 13 cases. See Charles Call, "Institutionalizing Peace: A review of post-conflict peacebuilding concepts and issues", a policy review for the Department of Political Affairs (2005).

jointly own, constructively engage on, and find common solutions to divisive national issues or critical policy questions. Although the results from these initiatives are still pending, the indicative outcomes are positive.

3. **The ability of the regional divisions to give guidance and to promote a cohesive and integrated United Nations system response in conflict prevention and peacebuilding is hampered by the lack of conceptual clarity.**

14. Responsibility for elements of prevention and peacebuilding is assigned to several United Nations entities. The regional divisions of the Department of Political Affairs are responsible for giving guidance to other United Nations programmes, funds and agencies in conflict prevention, and for promoting a more cohesive and integrated response by the United Nations system in addressing post-conflict peacebuilding challenges.[12]

15. A recent workshop involving various United Nations partners found that "[t]here is frequently no consensus among United Nations agencies on what conflict prevention practically means on the ground, nor on how it differs in policy and operational terms from 'normal' development interventions that aim to address vulnerability, exclusion, and participation (for instance)."[13] Such ambiguity has been the source of some tension between United Nations agencies; it has resulted in limited acceptance of the Department of Political Affairs and the regional divisions by the rest of the Organization as focal point and a source of guidance. It also makes a clear inter-agency division of labour in the field harder to craft and sustain, and it has hindered the development of a cohesive system-wide approach to conflict prevention.

16. In previous assessments by OIOS (1999) and the Department of Political Affairs (2002), regional division staff expressed concern about the lack of an operational post-conflict peacebuilding strategy and a common vision, insufficient policy guidance from managers, and a need to better integrate preventive diplomacy and peacebuilding concepts into their routine work programme. In 2004, those issues remained unresolved.[14]

17. At the Headquarters level, the Executive Committee for Peace and Security, convened by the Department of Political Affairs, was originally intended to provide system-wide policy development and coordination on preventive action. A 2002 review concluded that its potential as the principal advisory body remained under-utilized.[15] Interviews conducted during this evaluation reaffirmed that finding. OIOS noted that the Committee faces a particular difficulty in functioning as a decision-making body because policy decisions related to conflict issues require the participation of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, which is rare. The challenge of developing a comprehensive system for conflict prevention has now been taken up by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for

[12] Objectives of the Department of Political Affairs subprogramme 1 as stated in the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005 (A/55/6 (Prog. 1)), para. 1.4.

[13] Report of the "Lessons Learned Workshop: Integrating conflict sensitivity into United Nations planning and programming", (2005).

[14] Report of the Department of Political Affairs Change Management Team — "Working Group on Substantive Issues and Policy Planning" (2004).

[15] "The Executive Committee for Peace and Security — Review of its effectiveness and recommendations for reform" (May 2002).

Coordination (CEB), in close collaboration with the Department of Political Affairs,[16] while policy decisions relating to conflict situations are now taken up by the Policy Committee.[17]

18. With respect to system-wide coordination in peacebuilding, a "serious gap" has been highlighted in the strategic realm for post-conflict peacebuilding in that "[n]o single office brings together the various strands of the United Nations system at Headquarters".[18] To fill this gap, the Peacebuilding Commission has been established, with a Peacebuilding Support Office based within the Secretariat. The creation of this new office implies a dilution, if not a transfer, of the role of the Department of Political Affairs as the Organization's focal point for peacebuilding.[19]

4. The regional divisions have made good efforts to strengthen their relationships with other United Nations entities but most of these relationships remain fragile and are not institutionalized.

(a) There is a lack of reciprocity in the flow of information between the regional divisions and their partners.

19. The processes by which the Department of Political Affairs shares information with other departments, and how information from various partners is shared throughout the United Nations system, shape the quality of information and analytical products eventually provided to the Secretary-General.

20. OIOS noted that information-sharing mechanisms are not well structured and the flow of information is often not reciprocal. Many partners have indicated that while they give information to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, through the Department of Political Affairs, they receive little information in return. Some pointed to a weak consultation process on reports, and a failure to receive reports from the Department on relevant meetings at Headquarters. Partners also noted that draft reports for the Security Council are either not submitted to them for review or are submitted with insufficient time for meaningful review.

(b) Partnerships have not been institutionalized, posing risks to their long-term durability.

21. The regional divisions of the Department of Political Affairs have regular working interactions with various departments and agencies. Partnerships are forged primarily to exchange information, coordinate activities and leverage resources, with some joint activities. They cover a wide range of issues such as development and poverty eradication, human rights and the rule of law, elections and the building of democratic institutions, and the control of small arms.

22. The regional divisions participate in various joint programming and assessment exercises, including interdepartmental working groups and

[16] See Conclusions of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination at its first regular session of 2005 (CEB/2005/1).

[17] The Policy Committee was created by the Secretary-General for strengthening executive management of the United Nations Secretariat (Note to Staff issued on 6 May 2005).

[18] Call, op. cit.

[19] The Secretary-General's note on the Peacebuilding Support Office makes no mention of the role of the Department of Political Affairs and its division of labour.

multidisciplinary reviews. They have played a critical role in providing timely political guidance to the United Nations Country Teams and were instrumental in driving system-wide commitment to conflict prevention. A promising recent initiative was the joint sponsorship with UNDP of "peace and development advisers" to resident coordinators, though only to a few countries.

23. However, many of the partnerships remain informal and in some cases are very weak. While interviews indicate that many desk officers have good working relationships with the United Nations Country Teams, for others their relationship is "virtually non-existent". Partners in turn note that Department of Political Affairs desk officers are often absent when face-to-face interactions with national actors are crucial. With limited access to local and regional information networks, and limited resources for missions to the field, the regional divisions are constrained in developing and sustaining sound institutional partnerships.

24. OIOS noted that the lack of a formal structure and guidelines for those relationships undermined mutual accountability and limited the potential for meaningful long-term cooperation. Such relationships can easily dissolve with changes of personnel.

(c) The working relationships and operational arrangements with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations have improved but have yet to be fully institutionalized.

25. Although working relationships and operational arrangements between the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations have improved, OIOS noted that they have yet to be fully institutionalized. The only formal articulation of their working relationship is contained in paragraphs 126 and 127 of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387), which have not been formalized into operational guidelines. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has stressed "the urgent need to revisit the issue of coordination and cooperation between the two departments to ensure complementarity and avoid potential duplication and overlap and to consider a possible redistribution of resources",[20] reiterating its concerns raised during the previous two years (see A/59/784, para. 36, and A/58/7,[21] para. II.9).

26. Senior staff of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs interviewed by OIOS preferred open and flexible processes, arguing that formal structures and explicit guidelines should be minimized. OIOS is concerned that this preference for informality tends to undermine sustained cooperation and contributes to problems of inconsistencies in information-sharing and other exchanges between staff members, lack of clarity of mission support roles, and a continuing lack of guidance on such critical processes as handover of responsibility for missions as host countries enter different phases of conflict-peace transitions.

27. Furthermore, the experience of the Department of Political Affairs regional divisions regarding integrated missions has been highly dependent on personal

[20] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixtieth Session, Supplement No. 7* (A/60/7), para. II.7.

[21] Ibid., *Fifty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 7*.

relationships. Although the relationship with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is improving, Department of Political Affairs desk officers continue to express frustrations. This reliance on ad hoc initiatives and personalities is problematic from a systemic point of view.

28. As the current arrangements continue to cause frustration, and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions remains unsatisfied despite annual efforts to explain how the departments divide their responsibilities, it is perhaps time to explore alternatives for formal institutional arrangements, including a more sharply defined division of labour, that would meet the needs of both departments.

(d) The working relationship with regional commissions is not well established.

29. OIOS noted that regional commissions have occasionally tried to engage the Department of Political Affairs on certain issues of mutual interest. However, no systematic arrangements have materialized, so far, for establishing cooperation on a regular basis. The regional commissions rarely have occasion or opportunity to provide inputs for the reports prepared by the Department, including those relating to the cooperation between the United Nations and the regional/subregional groupings.

30. There is a need for more systematic and substantive cooperation between the Department of Political Affairs and the regional commissions, especially in supporting post-conflict peacebuilding work. More cooperation is also needed in preparation for and participation at the high-level meeting of the Secretary-General with regional organizations. Furthermore, the regional commissions requested that Department of Political Affairs missions, Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and Special Envoys contact them during their visits to the respective regions to exchange information and perspectives.

5. There is growing cooperation with regional organizations, but many of the agreed-upon modalities for better cooperation are yet to be implemented.

31. Towards the goal of maintaining international peace and security, the Department of Political Affairs and its regional divisions are mandated to provide support for cooperation with organizations within and outside the United Nations system, particularly with the secretariats of regional organizations, based on Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. OIOS surveys indicated that this work is greatly appreciated.

32. The Department of Political Affairs convenes the biennial high-level consultations between the United Nations and regional organizations on regional-global mechanisms of peace and security. Arising from those consultations were 13 modalities for cooperation[22] and a framework for cooperation with guiding principles and possible cooperative activities.

33. OIOS observed that the regional divisions have been active in using four of the 13 modalities for cooperation, namely, coordination and consultation (modality 1), better flows of information through systematic mechanisms (modality 2), visits of staff at working levels (modality 5), and arranging joint expert meetings (modality 7),

[22] Adopted at the third high-level meeting between the Secretary-General of the United Nations and heads of regional and other inter-governmental organizations.

including regional workshops and regular staff-level meetings and exchanges of information. On the whole, the regional organizations surveyed by OIOS were very positive about the responsiveness and openness of the relevant regional divisions to maintain and develop cooperation.

34. Nevertheless, the regional organizations would welcome more support from the regional divisions relating to the remaining modalities, for which there is either little follow-up or weak implementation. Specifically, the regional organizations would welcome regular management and staff-level dialogues and consultative meetings, better coordination among United Nations agencies at national and regional levels, better understanding of the regions by the Department of Political Affairs, better exchange of information (including political analyses), and more joint activities, including joint funding efforts, training programmes and staff exchanges.

B. Organizational and resource constraints on the quality of work

35. OIOS has identified two primary constraints hampering the quality of work of the regional divisions, which in turn, impact on various management, work process and staff issues.

1. The current organizational structure of the two mega-divisions covers geographic regions that are too large and disparate, resulting in inadequate attention to substantive and management issues.

36. Based on an analysis of conflict statistics and findings from the Center for International Development and Conflict Management[23] presented in table 1 below, OIOS believes that the splitting of the African region into two divisions is warranted given the high number of conflicts. In the mega-divisions of Asia and the Pacific and Americas and Europe, both management and staff have stated that placing disparate regional components under a single division is "artificial" given their geopolitical differences, and that the current structure undermines focus on emerging conflict situations. The sheer size of the combined regions and the number of countries reduce the degree of attention that subregions and countries at risk deserve. Few or no economies of scale result from the current arrangement, since substantive analysis and monitoring have to be done at the country-specific level, with each warranting differentiated managerial attention.

37. In addition, because so much effort is required for substantive support to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, through no fault of the managers who correctly prioritize response to emerging crises, management and operational issues are often given secondary consideration, to the detriment of internal systems and staff concerns. Staff indicated that the current structure negatively affected the management of staff.

38. OIOS found that the current divisional structure creates undue pressure on the management of the mega-divisions and also results in inadequate attention to both substantive and management issues.

[23] Monty G. Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2005: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy*, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, College Park (2005).

2. Staff and resource allocations are not commensurate with broad and expanding mandates and demands.

(a) Apparent under-coverage of potential conflict situations; some special political missions receive less than the desired amount of substantive support.

39. The regional divisions, as service centres, have highly variable, yet time-critical, demands for their services. Table 1 reflects the geographical areas and number of armed conflicts covered by the regional divisions, and allows for a partial assessment of the regional divisions' workload.[24]

Table 1
Countries, conflicts and special political missions coverage by regional divisions

	Africa I Division	*Africa II Division*	*Asia and the Pacific Division*	*Americas and Europe Division*	*Total*
a. Managers (Director and deputies)	2	2	3	3	10
b. Regular budget desk officers	9	10	13	10	42
c. Extrabudgetary personnel	0	2	4	4	10
d. General Service	5	6	7	7	25
Countries					
e. Number of countries covered	27	30	57	92	206
f. Ratio of countries to managers	13.5 : 1	15 : 1	19 : 1	30.7 : 1	20.6 : 1
g. Ratio of countries to desk officers	3 : 1	3 : 1	4 : 1	9 : 1	5 : 1
Conflicts					
h. Number of major armed conflicts	4	2	5	3	14
i. Number of "minor" armed conflicts	4	5	9	1	19
j. Number of countries with critically low peacebuilding capacity	11	14	16	9	50
k. Total countries requiring attention*	19	21	30	13	83
l. Ratio of countries requiring attention to desk officers	2.1 : 1	2.1 : 1	2.3 : 1	1.3 : 1	2.0 : 1
m. Regional division "focus countries"**	8	6	8	13	35
n. Current "focus countries" as a percentage of countries requiring attention	42%	29%	27%	100%	42%
Special political missions					
o. Number of special political missions supported (2004)	4	6	13	7	30

* Marshall and Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2005*.

** These are the number of "focus countries" reported in the Department of Political Affairs' Integrated Monitoring And Documentation Information System (IMDIS) report for the biennium 2004-2005.

[24] This does not include, for example, support to regional organizations and does not include countries in the Americas and Europe Division that are involved in conflicts in other regions.

40. The average number of countries covered per desk officer is five. Although, at some point, quantity imposes burdens of its own, a better measure of workload would be the number of conflicts and countries at risk of conflict in a given region. If one compares the number of "focus countries" of each division (line m) to the number of "countries requiring attention" (line k), there appears to be under-coverage (line n), except in the case of the Americas and Europe Division; the rest, on average, are able to focus on fewer than half of the countries that should be receiving attention.

41. Table 2 shows the increase in special political missions since the end of the 1990s. Currently, the Department of Political Affairs is responsible for the administration of only 9 of the 41 political missions, but the regional divisions are called upon to provide political advice, guidance and support for 30 of them.[25] OIOS has found that some special political missions receive less than the desired amount of substantive support and attention from the regional divisions.

Table 2
Growth in special political missions, 1998-2005

Biennium	*Number*	*Budgeted resources (millions of United States dollars)*
1998-1999	23	101.3
2000-2001	41	109.8
2002-2003	40	204.6*
2004-2005	41	475.7**(as at June 2005)

* Reflects the deployment of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the partial deployment of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

** Reflects full deployment of UNAMI.

Source: *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixtieth Session, Supplement No. 7* (A/60/7), table VIII.1.

(b) The desk officers do not have adequate time for monitoring, research and analytical work.

42. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the average total time allocation, by tasks, of the regional divisions' desk officers. Just over half of the average desk officer's time is spent on tasks other than research and writing. Though analytical papers should require more time, OIOS found that desk officers can only devote less than 16 per cent of their total writing time to them. Less than 20 per cent is devoted to monitoring and research activities that build and update the knowledge base that in turn supports all of the other substantive work. That percentage translates into roughly 90 minutes daily or, divided over the five countries in the average desk officer's portfolio, 18 minutes per country per day. One may indeed be concerned about how much quality information and analysis a desk officer can absorb with no more time than that to study critical cases daily.

[25] From the Department of Political Affairs' submission to the Policy Committee: "Strengthening the Secretary-General's good offices and mediation capacity" (14 October 2005).

43. This analysis does not take fully into consideration the sizeable portion of the desk officers' work devoted to the routine work of low-key diplomacy and networking that is necessary for long-term productive engagement. Considered against the overall workload, the inconsistent quality of information and analytical products is better understood. OIOS is of the view that there is a real under-resourcing of the regional divisions. The current staff complement allows merely adequate production of the current level of quantitative outputs, without the desired, and necessary, qualitative improvement.

44. OIOS also observed a need for greater clarity in the delineation of conflict-related work and support to the Secretary-General for all "political aspects" of relations with Member States and others. OIOS recognized that there is no easy solution to it. On the one hand, conflict-related matters clearly require the full attention of those officers assigned to them. On the other hand, the Secretary-General has a global political role that requires "foreign ministry" support. The rational solution would be to create two differently focused sections within the regional divisions, but that would entail a significant increase of staff resources with differentiated skill sets, to adequately cover all conflicts (real and potential) as well as maintain the required global political support to the Secretary-General.

Table 3

Quantified outputs of regional divisions* (Average for 2004 and 2005) and average time allocation of desk officers of regional divisions**

Outputs	*Africa I*	*Africa II*	*Asia-Pacific**	*Americas-Europe*	*Tasks*	*Percentage of time on task***
General Assembly reports	2	1	9	3		
General Assembly inputs	0	5	1	0		
Security Council reports	9	9	10	8		
Security Council inputs	0	0	2	1		
Briefing notes	111	43	138	120	Writing	29
Analytical papers	78	105	154	110		
Notes of meetings	80	138	242	228		
Talking points	184	167	330	177		
Profiles	18	50	61	68		
Official correspondence	287	459	808	178		
Participation in substantive meetings	103	164	226	230	Meetings	17
					Monitoring and research	19
					Management support	9
					Support to special political missions***	19
					Training	3
					Other tasks	4

* Outputs are average total outputs for 2004 and 2005 as reported by regional divisions. Asia and the Pacific outputs are only for 2005, as 2004 outputs were not available.

** Time allocation estimate based on survey and structured interviews of desk officers.

*** Africa I supports 4 special political missions; Africa II supports 6; Asia and the Pacific, 13; and Americas and Europe, 7.

45. OIOS is not in a position to specify the number of additional staff required. It noted the recent request of the Department of Political Affairs for 13 additional new posts for the regional divisions.[26] However, OIOS was informed that the assessment was done without an analytical framework and that it does not reflect the actual staff requirements of the divisions.

(c) The lack of access to timely and detailed information undercuts the divisions' ability to meet their early warning mandate.

46. Effective operational conflict prevention requires adequate warning time. Without a strong field presence, and without adequate resources, the regional divisions cannot follow unfolding events around the world in equivalent detail and timeliness. In order to set their priorities for monitoring and generation of timely analyses and policy options for the Secretary-General, the regional divisions rely on numerous sources of information to support their early warning and response work. These include information provided by Member States, regional and subregional organizations, the United Nations system (i.e., the Framework Team) and various external sources, including competent non-governmental entities and open and subscription-based sources.[27] OIOS noted the general opinion that what is presently doable under current resources is suboptimal for early warning.

(d) The trust funds developed to support subprogramme 1 have been well utilized and are depleted.

47. Two trust funds have been established to support the regional divisions in conflict prevention. Table 4 below shows the allocation by region and for thematic support. In total, 107 discrete activities have been supported. OIOS noted with concern that there has been no evaluation of these activities. Without closer study of the specific activities, OIOS is not in a position to assess their contribution to the mandates. However, OIOS noted that the availability of the trust fund support is, and has been, vital for the Department's ability to follow up on urgent prevention tasks and support of high-level, important prevention initiatives. The funds provide critical support for the mandated work of the regional divisions that are not covered by the regular budget. The Department of Political Affairs has no separate fund-raising or management staff for these trust funds. These tasks have been absorbed by the already overstretched Policy Planning Unit (PPU) located in the Office of the Under-Secretary-General. Both trust funds are currently depleted, without any clear indication of their replenishment.

[26] Submission to the Policy Committee: "Strengthening the Secretary-General's good offices and mediation capacity", annex I. [The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions recommended approval of only 6 of 15 staff requested, for the time being (A/60/7/Add.13, para. 33).]

[27] See, for example, the weekly CrisisWatch maintained by the International Crisis Group, online at www.crisisgroup.org/home/.

Table 4
Trust fund allocations by region*

Regions / *Trust funds*	*Africa I and II*	*Asia-Pacific*	*Americas-Europe*	*Thematic*	*Total*
	(millions of US dollars)				
Trust Fund for Preventive Action	5.1	2.8	1.7	1.8	**11.4**
Trust Fund for Special Political Missions and Other Activities	11.2	1.2	0.8	9.5	**22.7**
Total	**16.3**	**4.0**	**2.5**	**11.3**	**34.1**
Percentage allocation	48	12	7	33	**100**

* Figures are as of March 2005.

48. OIOS believes that a root cause of the mixed quality of work is the misalignment between resources and mandates, and the resultant heavy workload. Although there are certain management and technological initiatives that can be undertaken using current resources to address some of the problematic areas of work, there is a limit as to what such initiatives could achieve. In the opinion of OIOS, increased resources would be necessary to more effectively meet the broad mandates given to the regional divisions. Alternatively, mandates and functions may have to be clarified and limited, or reduced.

C. Managing for quality and other key issues to be addressed

49. It should be made clear that adding staff is a necessary but insufficient measure to ensure effective fulfilment of the regional divisions' mandates. For a transformation in qualitative terms, they require also the right competencies and additional resources to support the acquisition of field knowledge and strengthening of their analytical capability.

1. The regional divisions do not reliably produce quality products.

(a) The quality of information and analytical products is mixed.

50. The effectiveness of the Secretary-General, his representatives and senior officials in prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding depends, to some extent, on the quality, accuracy, timeliness and usefulness of the analytical and information services provided by the regional divisions of the Department of Political Affairs.

51. While there is unanimous, strong appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the staff in the regional divisions, the quality of their output is best described as "mixed", ranging from very good to very poor.

52. Given that these analytical and informational products are country or conflict-situation specific, OIOS notes with concern that any instances of poor analysis or information could adversely affect the ability of the Organization to respond appropriately.

53. OIOS observed the following perceptions of persisting weaknesses:

(a) The regional divisions cannot access the up-to-date and in-depth information needed to effectively identify and warn on potential conflicts.

(b) Senior officials strongly expressed a need for more strategic analysis with forward-looking positions clearly articulated.

(c) Political guidance is often short-term focused but also needs to address mid- to long-term scenarios.

(d) Analytical products tend to be narrowly politically focused, lacking the breadth of perspective needed to support decision-making in complex conflict situations.

(e) Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and Special Envoys need more information and guidance on lessons learned and best practices in conflict prevention measures.

(f) The quality of writing in documents of the Department of Political Affairs is uneven.

(b) There is little method to collecting information and conducting analysis, and there is no proper induction and handing over of portfolios.

54. The regional divisions' capacity to collect information is limited and there is no standard protocol for the collection of information: no checklist of recommended sources, and little guidance on the selection or analysis of sources. Each desk officer develops his or her own methodology. The lack of access to information is sometimes mitigated by the field experience of the officers. However, only 8 of 19 full-time desk officers had any previous field experience.[28] Moreover, OIOS observed that there is no formal process or methodology for monitoring a country, nor for conflict or political analysis that ensures systematic consideration of agreed key factors. There are a few online manuals available, some of which have sound methodological approaches.[29] However, without adaptation, they are not geared to support the work of desk officers. In any case, OIOS found that the majority of desk officers either were not aware of them or did not use them.

55. OIOS noted that, upon joining their division, many desk officers received no orientation or structured briefing, and while colleagues and managers were helpful in answering questions, no one really explained how information was to be collected. For several desk officers taking up new country assignments, there had been no systematic handover of primary sources and contacts, nor was there a handover briefing.

56. Some initiatives have been taken to fill the information and analysis gap. Within the United Nations system, the Framework Team is the primary source of system-wide information in support of early warning and conflict prevention. However, OIOS noted that the regional divisions have not established networks of area-based expertise within the United Nations system. There is a need for a communications strategy to be introduced to ensure clarity within the Department

[28] Call, op. cit.

[29] For example: the Framework Team, "Applying preventive measures"; the United Nations Development Group/Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, "Framework for analysis"; and the UNDP-Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, "Conflict-related development analysis".

and among its partners about the strategic and operational objectives of sharing information.

57. The Department of Political Affairs makes use of academic and non-governmental organizations for information-gathering and analytical tasks. Strong partnerships have been forged with, for example, the International Crisis Group, the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum, the Center for International Cooperation and the International Peace Academy. This strategy is sound, but the regional divisions must exercise due diligence to verify the objectivity and sources of support for the external information and analysis providers. The divisions also must retain sufficient analytical capability to ensure that issues continue to be viewed from a multilateral perspective.

2. **The creation of a policy planning unit has provided important policy support but its size limits its ability to support the regional divisions.**

58. The Policy Planning Unit was created to provide cross-cutting, thematic policy support to the Department of Political Affairs and the regional divisions. Although it has supported important policy reviews and policy development, and has established strong working relationships with external partners, its very low staffing level has seriously limited its ability to fulfil its mandate to provide policy coordination and capacity development support to the regional divisions. OIOS noted that the work of PPU is highly oriented towards meeting demands from the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for policy and ad hoc support, and these distract from its ability to support the regional divisions.

3. **The work process for preparation of information and analytical products is inefficient and dims the performance incentives of even the most talented desk officers.**

59. The Department of Political Affairs analytical and information products go through six to nine layers of review between the desk officer and the Secretary-General. Considering the layers of clearance involved, the previously-noted finding that those products are sometimes of poor quality is disturbing.[30] The many layers are also likely to contribute to delivery delays.[31]

60. OIOS acknowledges that it is important for different perspectives and sources of information, with differing levels of confidentiality, to be incorporated into a high-quality, accurate and strategically sound final product, and appreciates that there may be added value from each review layer. However, the current production chain is not just time-consuming. Lacking transparency, it does not facilitate the consideration of different viewpoints, stifles strategic thinking and creativity at the lower levels, does not provide feedback to the different parts of the production chain, and does not engender accountability and recognition for each individual's

[30] It is not uncommon for P-5s, D-1s and D-2s to be copy-editing written outputs, at the expense of substantive analytical and division management tasks. Without examining the sequence of drafts of a product, it is not possible to say where quality issues arise, except to note that the upper layers are, at best, not catching and correcting as much as they should and could be detracting more than they add.

[31] This was noted in an internal memorandum from the Chef de Cabinet to the Department of Political Affairs, dated 5 January 2005. On the basis of recent interviews, timeliness has improved with better organization of the process but it remains an issue.

contribution to the product. Thus it provides little incentive or empowerment for those involved to do their best work.

61. Furthermore, OIOS notes that there is often little difference in job responsibility between desk officers of different grade levels. P-3s and P-5s may have very similar assignments and responsibilities, which may serve as a disincentive to senior staff.

4. **Knowledge-sharing is not systematic.**

62. OIOS found that staff of the Department of Political Affairs rarely identified and shared their knowledge of good practices or lessons learned, documented ideas, or information and experience that might be useful to others. While there is some knowledge-sharing between divisions, it is largely ad hoc in nature. OIOS observed an absence of any knowledge management activities in the regional divisions.

63. An initiative that OIOS found commendable is the Peacemaker project: a web-based facility to provide support to Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, Special Envoys and other staff involved in peacemaking work by sharing experiences, guidelines and lessons learned. However, it has a very limited development budget, has not been officially launched and its utility is yet to be seen.

5. **Gender balance has improved but gender issues are not fully mainstreamed.**

64. The percentage of female staff members in the Professional and higher categories with appointments of at least one year has increased from 34.5 per cent in June 2000 to 48.8 per cent in September 2005. However, gender mainstreaming in the Department of Political Affairs has not been pursued systematically. Although the Department was the first entity within the United Nations system to hold gender-mainstreaming workshops starting in 1997, experience and expertise on this issue have not been effectively transferred across the divisions.[32] There is, for example, no systematic collection and analysis of gender-specific information.[33] OIOS also noted indications of frustration among women Professional staff that they are generally not given high-profile assignments, and that the Department's gender focal point is a General Service staff member who divides time between gender-related activities and a regular job.

6. **The results-based management approach is not used properly in the regional divisions and the performance appraisal system is not functioning adequately.**

65. For the biennium 2004-2005, the regional divisions had a target of addressing or settling through peaceful means, 60 potential, new or ongoing conflicts, and a target for there to be Department of Political Affairs post-conflict peacebuilding activities in 30 countries. At the end of the biennium, noting the difficulty of

[32] Finding in "Implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000): DPA's role and responsibility workshop report" (December 2005).

[33] For example, information on the special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction.

providing precise numbers of conflict situations addressed, the Department maintained those figures as its best-guess estimates of results attained [34]

66. OIOS is not in a position to comment on the validity of the best-guess estimates of the Department of Political Affairs. However, OIOS noted that the lack of measurability of the indicators does not support performance assessment and results-based management. More measurable output and intermediate-level outcome indicators can and should be identified.

67. Furthermore, in comparing the external assessments of the divisions' quality of work with the internal performance assessments of staff, OIOS noted a disconnect between results attained and the evaluation of performance. The regional divisions urgently need to establish, in consultation with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and other clients, more meaningful performance measures. OIOS observed that the e-PAS is not functioning adequately, either as a means of providing feedback or in performance assessment.

7. **Staff morale is low in three of four divisions but is improving.**

68. Except in one division, the majority of staff stressed a low level of morale. The presence of functioning subregional teams that meet regularly and backstop each other effectively, and an open, consultative, staff-oriented division management have contributed to good morale in one division. The sources of low morale emanate from both departmental and division levels; they include perceived lack of appreciation for staff and non-transparent management practices. Staff perceive that the new management of the Department of Political Affairs holds promise for restoration of trust between staff and management. However, there is concern that there will be little similar restoration of trust in one division where the problem is particularly acute.

8. **Change management efforts have been made, but there is no management for change.**

69. To their credit, the Department of Political Affairs and regional divisions' management have been aware of the weaknesses discussed in paragraphs 60 to 68 above for some time, and have made efforts to identify, if not address, them. Three internal assessments have been conducted since 1999 as well as several self-critical studies in attempts to improve the effectiveness of their work.

70. Unfortunately, many of the worthwhile recommendations were either neglected or the change process foundered, lacking the required champions at the appropriate management levels. Few of the recommendations made by the Department of Political Affairs Change Management Teams in 2004 have been implemented as neither beleaguered management nor staff have been able to follow through on internal operational improvements, training or competency development initiatives.

[34] As explained by the Department of Political Affairs in its report submitted via the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS), "in purely numerical terms, whether there are more or less conflicts vis-a-vis targets and estimates is not a reflection of the success or failure of the work of the regional divisions, but may be a useful indication of their workload. That is, it would be fatuous to conclude that the number of conflicts in the world was directly related to the work of the divisions".

V. Conclusions

71. OIOS appreciates the ability of the management and staff of the regional divisions to keep up with the increasing workload of recent years given limited resources, and acknowledges that many ongoing management challenges are due to the almost constant need to respond to the exigencies of crises, and the steady flow of demands for substantive support from the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and others.

72. However, their evolving mandates imply a set of expectations and requirements that the divisions may not be in a position to meet. Change initiatives attempted in the past failed because they lacked adequate leadership and resources. Unless provisions are made to support the required changes, including efforts to clarify mandates and establish organization-wide working processes with clear division of labour, neither the regional divisions nor the system at large will be in a good position to effectively meet future challenges.

73. OIOS makes 10 recommendations for enhancing the work of the regional divisions.

VI. Recommendations

Recommendation 1

74. The Department of Political Affairs and the regional divisions should, as a matter of priority, take the initiative in working with relevant United Nations partners to develop and propose a system-wide strategy to better address intra-State and transnational conflicts (see paras. 7-13 above). *The Department of Political Affairs commented that development of such a strategy would involve the United Nations system as a whole and, as such, it should be taken together with recommendation 3 below.*

Recommendation 2

75. In consultation with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and relevant United Nations system forums and partners, the Department of Political Affairs should seek clarification of its role and vision as the focal point for conflict prevention, peacemaking and post-conflict peacebuilding, and how the regional divisions are to support that role (see paras. 14-18 above) *The Department of Political Affairs acknowledged that clarification of its focal point role was necessary, but stated that that would be a time-consuming and sensitive process.*

Recommendation 3

76. The regional divisions should strengthen institutional mechanisms for inter-agency communications and for the design, promotion, mobilization and monitoring of system-wide support in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. These mechanisms should include: (a) an established protocol for inter-agency communications and information exchange on conflict-related reports and matters; (b) a well-defined concept for collaboration with the partner institutions and a needs assessment of each partnership (including regional commissions); and (c) where appropriate, guidelines for collaboration to clarify respective interests, roles and obligations of

the collaborating institutions. With regard to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, in order to strengthen complementarities and avoid duplications, a working group should be established to explore alternatives for formal institutional arrangements that would meet the needs of both departments (see paras. 19-30 above). *The Department of Political Affairs commented that although it readily acknowledged the need to address the division of labour with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, it felt strongly that that could not be achieved through the format of a working group as proposed in the present report.*

Recommendation 4

77. The regional divisions should seek to implement fully all the agreed-upon modalities for cooperation with the regional organizations (see paras. 31-34 above).

Recommendation 5

78. The regional divisions should undergo an intensive, time-bound and results-oriented change management process. This should include reviews of management, organization structure, human resources and work processes and, if necessary, reprofiling of the competency needs of the divisions to better meet their mandates. The review of organization structure should consider the restructuring of the two mega-divisions — the Asia and the Pacific Division and the Americas and Europe Division — to better support substantive and management prerogatives. The work of the Policy Planning Unit should be reviewed with the goal of more closely linking it to the priorities and needs of the regional divisions. All the reviews should consider gender issues as well. The process should be driven by mandate, be facilitated by external experts in change management, have a dedicated internal change management capacity, and be required to propose restructured, renewed and adequately resourced regional divisions (see paras. 36-46, 49-53, 58 and 68-70 above).

Recommendation 6

79. An independent, external evaluation should be conducted of both the Trust Fund for Preventive Action and the Trust Fund for Special Political Missions and Other Activities, to assess their effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and impact, as well as their management and operations (see paras. 47 and 48 above).

Recommendation 7

80. A protocol for information collection and a framework for conflict analysis should be established, in consultation with end-users and experts in the field, as well as with regional organizations to ensure relevance to local and regional concerns. The resulting protocol and framework for analysis should be made part of an orientation toolkit for desk officers, made available on the Intranet, and they should also be periodically reviewed and improved (see paras. 54-57 above).

Recommendation 8

81. The regional divisions should develop a knowledge management strategy for developing, organizing, storing, sharing and using their knowledge assets. In addition, the Department of Political Affairs should establish an evaluation policy to

support institutional knowledge and best practices development (see paras. 62 and 63 above).

Recommendation 9

82. The regional divisions should establish division-level gender-mainstreaming goals and action plans; these should be in support of the department-level gender-mainstreaming action plan and have direct links to management and individual performance plans (e-PAS). The regional divisions should also designate gender focal points for each division, to support the work of the Department's gender focal point (see para. 64 above).

Recommendation 10

83. The regional divisions should strengthen their results-based management system. A clear relationship should be established between the e-PAS, the division management plans and the subprogramme logical framework. In consultation with their primary "clients", the divisions should further refine and develop performance indicators that are meaningful for internal management purposes (see paras. 65-67 above).

(*Signed*) Inga-Britt **Ahlenius**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

4 April 2006